

'Europe serious about getting more US LNG'



An LNG carrier sits docked at the Cheniere Energy terminal in this aerial photograph taken over Sabine Pass, Texas (file). European nations are far behind Mexico and China when it comes to receiving liquefied natural gas from the US, but the region is making its biggest effort to date to change that, according to Bloomberg. European Commission trade officials will travel to Washington on August 20 to follow up on an energy agreement last month between the Commission's President Jean-Claude Juncker and US President Donald Trump. Europe pledged to import more LNG in a bid to diversify imports, while America is seeking new markets for its expanding LNG production. Russia is currently Europe's biggest supplier. "The European Union is ready to facilitate more imports of liquefied natural gas from the US and this is already the case as we speak," Juncker said in a statement yesterday. "The growing exports of US liquefied natural gas, if priced competitively, could play an increasing and strategic role in EU gas supply." Europe received about 10% of total US exports

last year, up from 5% in 2016 after the American shale gas revolution went global with the opening of the Sabine Pass export facility on the country's Gulf of Mexico coast. Since then, Europe has imported more than 40 LNG cargoes from the US, or 2.8bn cubic metres, the Commission said.

Qatar to invest \$15 billion in Turkey; source says banks the focus



ANKARA (Reuters) – Qatar pledged \$15 billion (£11.8 billion) of investment in Turkey on Wednesday

that a government source in Ankara said would be channelled into its banks and financial markets.

The investment package was announced after Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani met President Tayyip Erdogan in the capital, as Turkey grapples with a collapsing lira and a

worsening commercial and political standoff with NATO ally the United States.

The currency has lost nearly 40 percent against the dollar this year, driven by worries over Erdogan's growing influence on the economy and his repeated calls for lower interest rates despite high inflation.

Its precipitous decline has raised concerns about the resilience of Turkey's banking sector and caused ructions on global markets.

Qatar-Glencore venture values its Rosneft stake at 7.4 billion euros



MOSCOW (Reuters) – QHG Oil Ventures, a joint venture between Qatar Investment Authority and Glencore, has valued a 14.2

percent stake in Rosneft, which it is selling, at 7.4 billion euros (\$8.4 billion), a QHG financial statement showed on Wednesday.

QHG was set up by QIA and Glencore in 2016 to invest in Rosneft and it bought a 19.5 percent stake in the Russian company for 10.2 billion euros. In its statement on Wednesday, QHG said that stake was now valued at 10.4 billion euros, meaning it has changed little in value in two years.

QHG also said in the financial statement, which covered the period between Dec. 8 2016 and May 31 2018, that it made a profit of more than 672 million euros during that period, mostly from Rosneft dividends.

The 2016 sale of the stake in Rosneft was trumpeted by the Kremlin at the time as a landmark deal and vote of confidence in the Russian economy, despite Western sanctions.

But the deal, from the outset, was mired in unanswered questions about how it was structured.

After the transaction was announced in 2016, it transpired that it was only an interim deal, and that a long-term buyer for the stake had yet to be found.

Rosneft came close to concluding a deal with China's CEFC last year, but that deal ran into trouble after CEFC founder and chairman Ye Jianming was put under investigation by Chinese authorities over suspected economic crimes, Reuters reported in March.

Eventually Qatar's investment fund agreed to become the permanent owner, resulting in the sale agreement in May.

In its financial results, QHG said it expected that deal to complete by the end of this year.

QIA would eventually control an equity stake of 18.93 percent in Rosneft and Glencore would hold 0.57 percent.

On Dec. 7 2016, when the deal to sell 19.5 percent in Rosneft to Glencore and QIA was announced, Rosneft's shares were trading at around 356.3 roubles (4.7 euros) per share compared to 427.1 roubles on Wednesday.

China tariffs could mean bleak winter ahead for US LNG traders



This winter could be a bleak one for America's natural gas exporters as the fastest-growing buyer of the fuel threatens to halt purchases amid an escalating trade war. PetroChina, a unit of the state-owned China National Petroleum Corp, may suspend its buying of US liquefied natural gas cargoes during the colder months, just as new American LNG terminals start up. The move could force gas suppliers like Cheniere Energy Inc to cut prices as they seek to lure other buyers

during the heating season, when demand peaks. While US LNG companies make the bulk of their money from long-term contracts, Cheniere last winter reaped big earnings from the spot market, which saw Asian prices climb to three-year highs amid booming consumption in China. But with China eyeing a 25% tariff on US LNG, Cheniere and other US LNG traders may have no choice but to sell spot volumes at a discount, Jason Gabelman, vice president at Cowen and Company LLC, said by telephone on Monday. Cheniere didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. The "US is probably going to have more spot LNG available than it would have had otherwise if it had been selling into the Chinese market," Gabelman said. Other buyers in Asia may look to take advantage of low-cost US gas. Cheniere announced August 10 a binding 25-year contract with Taiwan's state-owned CPC Corp beginning in 2021. "If you're selling gas in the spot market, you need to find a new place" for cargoes that would have gone to China, said Nikos Tsafos, a senior fellow at the energy and national security programme at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

**Hardcore hedge fund bulls say
Iran sanctions may see oil at
\$150**



LONDON (Reuters) – Clouds are gathering over the outlook for the oil market, as trade tensions and rising crude supply threaten to swamp demand growth, but some of the world’s most prominent energy investors are convinced the price will return to record highs.

The escalating trade war between the United States and China threatens global growth. The physical markets are already showing signs of strain as unwanted crude builds on ships and crushes prices for cargoes of oil. [CRU/E] [CRU/WAF] [CRU/MED]

Aside from that, interest rates around the world are rising and the dollar is strengthening, which means emerging market oil buyers are seeing their import bill growing almost daily.

Both OPEC and the International Energy Agency have warned about the risk of trade disputes to global demand growth in their most recent monthly market outlooks. [IEA/M] [OPEC/M]

Funds have cut their bullish bets on Brent and U.S. crude futures and options to their lowest in almost a year. [CFTC/] [O/ICE]

Despite all this, prominent hedge funds such as Andurand Capital and Westbeck Capital are betting oil could skyrocket

to \$150 a barrel from around \$75 now LC0c1.

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The main driver is expected to be upcoming U.S. sanctions on Iran's energy sector, which kick in November.

"Our view is that by November 4, we will have lost between 1.3 and 1.4 million barrels (of output) a day. It is a very big number. That's based on the view that the U.S. will allow a few temporary exception waivers ... Ultimately, we could see losses from Iran exceed 2 million barrels a day," Jean-Louis Le Mee, chief executive officer of London-based Westbeck, said.

(GRAPHIC: Major forecasters' estimates of oil demand growth in 2018 – reut.rs/2vIs2Xp)



U.S. President Donald Trump in May walked away from a 2015 nuclear deal between world powers and Tehran that he said was one-sided in Iran's favour.

Trump has also blamed OPEC for the 45-percent rise in oil prices over the last 12 months and, in June, exchanged sharp words with Iran on the subject.

Pierre Andurand, who runs the \$1.2-billion Andurand Commodities Fund and predicted the rise and subsequent crash in the oil price in 2008, responded on Twitter by pointing out OPEC's spare capacity was at its lowest ever. "There is going to be a real issue," he wrote, predicting prices above \$150 per barrel within two years.

"We don't sense a great deal of engagement yet from generalist investors. A few of them are starting to look at it now," Will Smith, Westbeck chief investment officer said.

"This is going to catch everybody by surprise. Some of the specialists are bullish – including Pierre (Andurand),

ourselves and Energy Aspects,” he said.

Aside from the risk to Iranian supply, Venezuela’s crude production, which has already collapsed as a result of economic crisis, could fall below 1 million barrels per day (bpd) by the end of the year, compared with 2 million bpd in mid-2017, Smith said.

Andurand Capital declined to comment.

Taking a contrarian view can be costly. Even Andurand took a hit in 2017 when he expected the oil price to rally sharply and, instead, it wallowed around the \$50 mark.

And he wasn’t alone. A number of long-time oil investors such as U.S. commodity fund manager Andy Hall were reportedly so badly burned they shut up shop and bowed out.

Westbeck’s Energy Opportunity Fund is up 4.1 percent in the year to July 13, showed an investor presentation shared with Reuters. Andurand’s commodities fund is up 12 percent in the first six months of 2018, according to data compiled by HSBC.

The oil options market shows that, for contracts from October 2018 to December 2020, traders and investors are holding more contracts to buy crude futures – or calls – at \$100 a barrel than any other.

However, in line with Westbeck’s view that \$150 oil is not one that is widely shared in the investment community, that position has barely changed in the last month, having dropped by a mere 1,500 lots to just over 107,000 lots, equivalent to 100 million barrels of oil.

(GRAPHIC: Brent crude oil investors bulk up on bearish sell options – reut.rs/2P9dAQA)



By contrast, in the last month, the largest change in holdings, or open interest, has materialised in contracts to

sell oil – or puts – at \$60 to \$65 a barrel between October 2018 and December 2020. This position has grown by nearly 45,000 lots to 140,000 lots, or 140 million barrels of oil.

A month ago, the amount of open interest in calls maturing in this time period outnumbered that of puts by nearly three to one. This ratio is now down to two to one.

“If we are right about oil going from \$75 to \$150 over the next 12 to 18 months, out-of-the-money oil options, further down the curve ... look very exciting. The pay back there is just fantastic if we are right,” Westbeck’s Smith said.

Italy’s League sees euro collapse without ECB bond guarantee



ROME (Reuters) – The economic spokesman of Italy’s ruling League party warned on Monday that unless the European Central Bank offers a guarantee to cap yield spreads in the euro zone, the euro will collapse.

“The situation can’t be resolved, and it is going to explode,” Claudio Borghi told Reuters after Italian, Spanish and Portuguese government bond yields rose in the wake of the financial turmoil in Turkish markets.

Borghi said the ECB should guarantee that yield spreads between euro zone government bonds not exceed a certain level, suggesting 150 basis points between the yields of any two sovereign bonds as a reasonable maximum.

“Either the ECB offers a guarantee or the euro will be dismantled,” said Borghi, who is president of the lower house budget committee.

The extra yield that investors demand for holding Italian bonds over top-rated German ones rose to its highest since late May earlier on Monday, briefly rising above 280 basis points before easing back to around 275.

A former trader and managing director at Deutsche Bank, Borghi said he expected those now selling peripheral euro zone debt would “end up losing out” because sooner or later the ECB would be forced to issue the guarantee he is calling for.

He said the fact that contagion from Turkey was pushing up yields in several euro zone countries showed that Italy’s domestic political and economic situation was not the main reason for market pressure on its stocks and bonds in recent days.

Safe-haven German Bund yields fell to a one-month low, but Spanish and Portuguese bond yields were dragged higher by their Italian peers and the broader sentiment going against market assets seen as carrying greater risk.

Italy’s 10-year yield at one point reached a two-month high at 3.109 percent, heading towards levels seen in late May when a political crisis triggered a huge sell-off in Italian debt.

The right-wing League has governed since June with the anti-establishment 5-Star Movement, eventually forming a coalition among former rivals following an inconclusive March election.

Ahead of the election, the League had called for Italy to exit the euro, but since forging its alliance with 5-Star it has repeatedly denied any suggestion that it is planning to orchestrate Italy’s exit from the single currency.

Reporting by Gavin Jones; Editing by Hugh Lawson
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GE is said to ready \$1.5bn

sale of power-conversion unit



Bloomberg New York General Electric Co is working with bankers on a possible sale of its power-conversion business, people familiar with the matter said, as the fallen manufacturer attempts to regain its footing by slimming down. The unit formerly known as Converteam could fetch about \$1.5bn, below the \$3.2bn GE paid for the assets in 2011, said the people, who asked not to be identified as the matter isn't public. Credit Suisse Group AG is working with GE on the sale process, which could begin as soon as next month and isn't guaranteed to lead to a transaction, the people said. The advisers are likely to approach private equity firms and companies such as Caterpillar Inc, Schneider Electric SE and ABB Ltd, the people said. GE will consider all options and could opt to keep the business, which is known for making oil-rig motors. Representatives of GE, Credit Suisse, Schneider and ABB declined to comment. Representatives for Caterpillar didn't respond to requests for comment. A deal would deepen GE chief executive officer John Flannery's efforts to streamline the

conglomerate, which is reeling from cash-flow challenges and a power-market slump. He has already agreed to unload the century-old locomotive business, while also promising to spin off the health unit and sell GE's majority stake in oilfield-equipment maker Baker Hughes. GE fell 26% this year through Thursday, following a 45% plunge in 2017. The slump, which has wiped out \$167bn in investor wealth since the beginning of last year, prompted GE's recent expulsion from the Dow Jones Industrial Average. The power-conversion unit builds motors, generators and automation controls for industries such as marine transportation and oil and gas. A sale would further unwind the sprawling version of GE pushed by former CEO Jeffrey Immelt, who stepped down last year. During his 16-year tenure, Immelt built a sizeable oil equipment business, started a digital division, expanded the health unit and bought power assets such as Converteam – all of which are being divested or shrunk under Flannery. While GE is keeping its power, renewable energy and aviation divisions under Flannery's recovery plan, the CEO is still looking to prune unwanted pieces. The company agreed in June to sell its industrial gas- engine business to Advent International for \$3.25bn.

Germany says Trump's tariffs and sanctions destroy jobs, growth



Reuters/Berlin

German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier has sharply criticised US President Donald Trump's tariffs and sanctions policies, saying such measures were destroying jobs and growth and that Europe would not bow to US pressure regarding Iran.

The United States has triggered a bitter tit-for-tat trade dispute with import tariffs meant to protect American jobs against what Trump calls unfair trade practices from China, Europe and other countries.

Trump's determination to push ahead with sanctions on Tehran which also target European companies doing business with Iran has opened another battle front.

"This trade war is slowing down and destroying economic growth – and it creates new uncertainties," Altmaier told Bild am Sonntag newspaper, adding that consumers suffered the most because higher tariffs were driving up prices.

Altmaier lauded the agreement reached by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker during negotiations with Trump last month, saying the interim deal had saved hundreds of thousands of jobs in Europe.

The US and the European Union are embroiled in a spat after Trump imposed tariffs on aluminium and steel imports and

Brussels responded with retaliatory tariffs on some US goods. Trump had also threatened to impose tariffs on EU auto imports but reached an agreement to hold off on taking action after meeting with Juncker at the White House last month.

“The agreement between the EU and US can only be a first step. Our goal is a global trade order with lower tariffs, less protectionism and open markets,” Altmayer said.

Turning to the US sanctions against Iran, the minister said Germany and its EU allies would continue to support companies doing business with Iran despite US pressure.

“We won’t let Washington dictate us with whom we can do business and we therefore stick to the Vienna Nuclear Agreement so that Iran cannot build atomic weapons,” Altmayer said.

German companies should be allowed to continue to invest in Iran as much as they want and the German government is looking for ways together with its European allies to ensure that financial transactions could still take place, he added.

Several European companies have suspended plans to invest in Iran in light of the US sanctions, including oil major Total as well as carmakers PSA, Renault and Daimler.

German business associations have warned that companies are increasingly suffering from Trump’s sanctions policies – including those against Iran – as well as the tariffs he is imposing in the escalating trade conflict with China.

The trade and sanctions disputes are clouding the growth outlook for Germany, Europe’s largest economy, but Altmayer said he nonetheless expected strong growth this year due to vibrant domestic demand, record-high employment and rising wages.

The Federal Statistics Office will publish preliminary gross domestic product figures for the second quarter on Tuesday, with analysts expecting the quarterly growth rate to pick up to 0.4% after 0.3% in the first quarter.

La fronde anti-éoliennes prend de l'ampleur



Par Marie-Estelle Pech

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ENQUÊTE – Le gouvernement souhaite doubler le nombre d'éoliennes sur le territoire dans les cinq prochaines années. Mais la contestation s'intensifie et réunit des opposants de tous bords.

Après les McDonald's et les champs d'OGM, la prochaine cible des écologistes ou des zadistes sera-t-elle l'éolien? En juin, un feu criminel détruisait une éolienne et en endommageait une autre à Marsanne, dans la Drôme. L'attaque a été revendiquée mi-juin par un site libertaire précisant «s'attaquer aux dominations». Du bourgeois au militant mélenchoniste en passant par l'anarchiste, le pêcheur et le châtelain, l'opposition à l'éolien est «de plus en plus composite», affirme Fabien Bouglé, porte-parole du collectif d'opposants Touche pas à nos îles! en guerre contre le projet de parc éolien au large de l'île de Noirmoutier, en Vendée.

Certes, cette opposition a historiquement débuté chez des pronucléaires situés bien à droite, «mais ça change», souligne cet élu versaillais, spécialiste du marché de l'art, qui témoigne avoir assisté à une lecture sur le sujet dans une «librairie anar de gauche» à Paris, et qui prophétise «une grande révolte populaire anti-éoliennes». D'autant que semble s'opérer une mutation: la contestation, jusque-là cantonnée aux citoyens et aux associations anti-éoliennes, trouve désormais des voix et des relais dans le monde politique pour porter le combat.

Ainsi Xavier Bertrand, ancien ministre du Travail et actuel président de la région des Hauts-de-France, qui a lancé fin juin un observatoire de l'éolien afin de mieux contrôler l'expansion des parcs dans sa région, qui «défigure complètement les paysages» et «coûte les yeux de la tête». Ou encore ces dix députés, tant de la majorité que de l'opposition, qui ont signé une tribune, «Stop aux nouvelles éoliennes!», dans nos éditions du 20 juin dernier.

Projet «antidémocratique»?

La France constitue aujourd'hui le quatrième parc d'Europe derrière l'Allemagne, l'Espagne et la Grande-Bretagne. Sa proportion d'électricité éolienne représente moins de 5 % de sa consommation mais, d'ici à 2023, les éoliennes terrestres devraient doubler, passant de 7300 à quelque 15.000. «C'est le deuxième gisement de vent d'Europe et la deuxième façade maritime. Le potentiel est considérable», selon Pauline Le Bertre, déléguée générale de France Énergie éolienne (FEE).

On compte 70 % de recours contre les permis de construire devant les tribunaux administratifs, contre 50 % il y a cinq ans

Si l'Allemagne a depuis longtemps compris «la nécessité impérative d'avoir une transition énergétique, en France, de

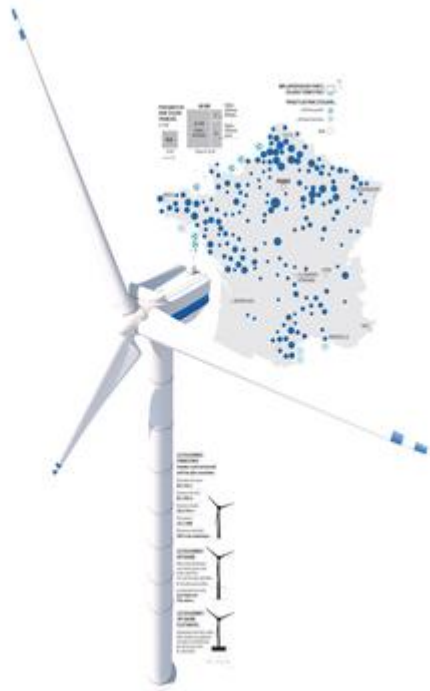
nombreuses associations jouent sur les angoisses des gens, propageant des idées reçues». Le degré d'opposition à l'éolien serait, selon elle, unique en Europe, lié à notre historique avec le nucléaire.

De fait, malgré le discours politique français très volontariste sur le sujet, malgré les sondages favorables à l'éolien menés auprès des Français, l'installation des éoliennes suscite de plus en plus d'opposition. On compte 70 % de recours contre les permis de construire devant les tribunaux administratifs, contre 50 % il y a cinq ans. Une perte de temps pour les promoteurs: la mise en route d'un parc est désormais d'environ neuf ans, contre quatre pour l'Allemagne.

Pour accélérer le processus, le gouvernement a décidé de supprimer le premier degré de juridiction, le tribunal administratif, pour passer directement à la cour administrative d'appel. Un projet de décret est actuellement en consultation devant le Conseil d'État. Cela se pratique déjà pour les projets éoliens en mer, les multiplexes de cinéma et les supermarchés. Un projet «antidémocratique» pour Fabien Bouglé, et qui, ces derniers mois, mobilise et durcit plus encore le front anti-éolien.

Biodiversité

Les associations d'opposants s'offusquent aussi d'un décret paru le 11 juillet qui permet de moderniser les parcs existants sans reprendre de zéro toutes les études d'impact. Que reprochent ces opposants à l'éolien? Sa laideur, sa proximité avec des habitations et des monuments historiques, ses nuisances sonores, ses lumières «aveuglantes», des installations entachées de multiples prises illégales d'intérêt de la part des élus. Les arguments sont multiples. Et parfois écoutés.



Des éoliennes ne seront ainsi pas installées en arrière-plan du paysage du Mont-Saint-Michel, pas plus que du côté du pont du Gard. Pauline Le Bertre, elle, indique qu'en France «les restrictions d'installation sont les plus élevées d'Europe. On multiplie les études d'impact liées à la biodiversité, le patrimoine, les habitations.» À l'entendre, une éolienne implantée à 500 mètres d'une habitation, le minimum réglementaire, «fait un bruit semblable à celui d'un frigidaire». Elle vante la compétitivité du mégawatt éolien, 64 euros contre 110 pour le nucléaire dernière génération. Inversement, Karine Poujol, à la tête de l'association Gardez les caps, considère que les 64 éoliennes prévues en baie de Saint-Brieuc provoqueront la mort de la biodiversité sous-marine, alors même que la zone est protégée Natura 2000. Elle anticipe un bruit «semblable à celui d'un décollage d'avion».

Loïk Le Floch-Prigent, ancien PDG d'Elf Aquitaine, défend les coquilles Saint-Jacques du cap Fréhel, qui pourraient être «très affectées» par ces installations fixées par 42 mètres de fonds. L'ancien industriel se défend de jouer pour le camp des pronucléaires, lui qui a «toujours défendu le fait qu'il fallait diversifier», rapporte-t-il au *Figaro*. Il met en doute cette politique qui «pénalise notre compétitivité en augmentant nos importations de matériel: 95 % des

investissements de l'éolien viennent d'Allemagne, du Danemark, d'Inde ou de Chine, tandis que deux tiers des exploitants viennent d'ailleurs». Ce printemps, la Cour des comptes affirmait que «le tissu industriel français a peu profité du développement des énergies renouvelables». Malgré des moyens considérables, qui se sont élevés en 2016 à 5,3 milliards d'euros. La prévision de dépense publique en 2023, elle, est de 7,5 milliards d'euros.

Caspian Sea nations to sign landmark deal



The leaders of the five states bordering the Caspian Sea meet in Kazakhstan on Sunday to sign a landmark deal on the inland sea which boasts a wealth of oil and gas reserves and sturgeon.

Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan are expected to agree a long-awaited convention on the legal status of the sea, which has been disputed since the collapse of the Soviet Union rendered obsolete agreements between Tehran and Moscow.

Talks in the port city of Aktau should help ease tensions in a militarised region where the legal limbo has scuppered lucrative projects and strained relations among nations along the Caspian's 7,000-kilometre (4,350-mile) shoreline.

The Kremlin said the convention keeps most of the sea in shared use but divides up the seabed and underground resources.

It does not allow military bases from any other countries to be sited on the Caspian.

'Once a frontier oil province'

Sunday's summit is the fifth of its kind since 2002 but there have been more than 50 lower-level meetings since the Soviet breakup spawned four new countries on the shores of the Caspian.

The deal will settle a long-lasting dispute on whether the Caspian is a sea or a lake—which means it falls under different international laws.

The draft agreement, briefly made public on a Russian government portal in June, refers to the Caspian as a sea but the provisions give it "a special legal status", Russian deputy foreign minister Grigory Karasin told Kommersant daily.

It is the Caspian's vast hydrocarbon reserves—estimated at around 50 billion barrels of oil and just under 300 trillion cubic feet (8.4 trillion cubic metres) of natural gas in proved and probable reserves—that have made a deal both vital and complex to achieve.

"Disputes arose when the Caspian was a frontier oil province,"

said John Roberts, a non-resident senior fellow at Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center, while it is "now well established, with major fields approaching peak... production."

'Expand cooperation'

Any deal will "expand the field for multilateral cooperation" between the five states, said Ilham Shaban, who heads the Caspian Barrel thinktank.

But some are likely to view it as more of a breakthrough than others.

Energy-rich but isolated Turkmenistan is particularly excited and President Gurganguly Berdymukahmedov has called for annual Caspian Sea Day celebrations from Sunday onwards.

Turkmenistan could benefit from a concession allowing the construction of underwater pipelines, which were previously blocked by the other states.

Nevertheless, analysts caution that Turkmenistan's long-held plan to send gas through a trans-Caspian pipeline to markets in Europe via Azerbaijan is not necessarily closer to becoming reality.

The plan was previously opposed by Russia and Iran, which could still attempt to block the pipeline—valued at up to \$5 billion—on environmental grounds.

"A deal in Aktau is not a legal prerequisite for the construction of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline," said Kate Mallinson, Associate Fellow for the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House.

"Neither will a major transport corridor to export Turkmen gas to Europe emerge overnight."

Kudos and caviar

As previous exclusive arbiters of Caspian agreements, Russia and Iran could be seen as the new deal's biggest losers.

But while Moscow has ceded ground on underwater pipelines "it gains political kudos for breaking a log-jam," enhancing its image as diplomatic dealmaker, said Roberts of the Eurasia Center.

Russia will welcome the clause barring third countries from having military bases on the Caspian, underscoring its military dominance there, said Shaban of Caspian Barrel.

Iran gets the smallest share of the Caspian spoils under the new deal, but could take advantage of new legal clarity to engage in joint hydrocarbons ventures with Azerbaijan.

In the past Tehran has resorted to hostile naval manoeuvres to defend its claims to contested territory.

Beyond military and economic questions, the agreement also offers hope for the Caspian's ecological diversity.

Reportedly depleted stocks of the beluga sturgeon, whose eggs are prized globally as caviar, may now grow thanks to "a clear common regime for the waters of the Central Caspian," Roberts said.

The deal could result "not only in stricter quotas for sturgeon fishing, but in stricter enforcement of these quotas," he added.